The FOLLIES of the YEAR

Marilynn Miller

Martha Mansfield

Katheryn Perry.

Dolores.

THE harmless but evidently necessary pun has reappeared in "La! La! Lucille," which is rich enough in fun even to allow its author to take the risk of indulging occasionally in this antique device of humor. Yet there was a time in which American burlesque, and the British from which it derived, was successful or not in accordance with the quality of its puns. The rhymed burlesque of H. J. Byron, which prevailed on the London stage throughout so many years, was like the suet pudding, good when it was stuffed with puns instead of raisins and poor when it failed in this important ingredient. John Brougham, who was accepted unqualifiedly as a New Yorker, was nevertheless born in England, and when he came to write burlesque it was inevitable he should follow the formula prevailing in his native land. So he adopted American subjects, but held tight to the manner of H. J. Byron, puns and all. His burlesque of "Pocahontas," which, taken in comparison with Moeller's "Poor Pokie," is an amusing study in contrasting theories of humor, was especially commended in its time for the superiority of its puns. There have been critics who called historic the line:

Like Metamora both in face and feature,
I never met a more-amusing-creature.

None of Brougham's burlesques was ever so popular as "Pocahontas," nor did any other receive the same critical attention, maybe due in part to the use of an American theme which had been lacking in the "Ixions," "Robinson Crusoes" and the rest of the British works brought here by the popular English "blondes" of that day.

Just as burlesque finally died after its long existence on the stage of the Gaiety Theatre in London did the pun pass out of existence with the librettists of those works. When "Carmen," "Esmeralda," a burlesque of "Monte Cristo," "Little Jack Sheppard" and the last of the burlesques seen on the Gaiety stage ceased to interest the public, musical comedy, beginning with "In Town" and "A Gaiety Girl," took the place of this essentially London product. Of course, a pun seemed entirely inconsistent with the kind of humor that writers of the new school of musical play sought to supply. Surely it could not have been worse than some of the agonizingly tedious episodes that the actors drew out to incredible lengths. But the change was complacently regarded as an advance in taste.

Burlesque dropped out of favor here long before it did in London. The French opera bouffe, performed among others by Marie Aimee, perhaps the most popular of all these interesting Gallic visitors, began to entertain Americans highly. In addition to the French troupes that came here from Paris and Havana beloved American favorites acted and sang in translations of these works, and the pun was not heard in the land. Burlesque lasted sporadically until the late '70s. Samuel Colville, a specialist in this sort of entertainment, carried a company over the country appearing in the old pieces. Willie Edouin asking for his "lumber william," which means his board bill, was the star. Of them "Babes in the Wood" was possibly the most popular.

It was not such wit as that quoted from Mr. Edouin which brought fortune to these belated specimens of burlesque, but rather songs so popular as "Baby Mine" and "Whoa, Emma," which had just then begun to sweep the country. Both were, by the way, importations from England. Burlesque passed away in the early '80s, with only Cheever Goodwin's American specimen, "Evangeline," to reappear occasionally in revival. But that was little afflicted with the pun. When Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas delighted the public so much there was no demand for the older forms. And the pun in Gilbert's humor was not important. It is true that the trustee of beauty asks of *Patience*, "Do you yearn?" and that she answers, "I earn my living." But that is not a serious breach of the highest laws of humor. The pun is rare to-day; so for that matter are theatre topics in June, else its modest reappearance at the Henry Miller Theatre might not have been discussed at all.

THE CAREER OF THE COBURNS.

A great deal has been printed about the Coburns and their meteoric rise from al fresco performers and producers of Shakespeare and Moliere to the front rank of New York producing managers. They are distinctive and unique in being the only combination of "Mr. and Mrs." in the theatrical producing field in America. In England there have been several similar combinations, notably Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, Mr. and Mrs. F. R. Benson, Sir Charles and Lady Wyndham, Charles Manners and Fanny Moody (the Moody-Manners Opera Company) and the late Sir Henry Irving and Helen Terry. These combinations embraced the business side as well as the production and technical phases of their repertory; but Mr. and Mrs. Coburn is the only firm of managers in the American theatrical field who are partners in wedlock as well as "fifty-fifty" in all their business enterprises. They select their own plays, act in them, operate their own theatre, exploit their own attractions and give their personal attention to all the business details of their executive offices.

Mr Coburn has been active in the theatre since he was a lad of 18 in Savannah, Ga., when he was manager of the old Savannah Theatre, which, incidentally, before being remodelled a few years ago, was the oldest playhouse in the United States with the exception of the old Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. Mrs. Coburn (nee Ivah Wells) hails from the middle West. She was born in a village in Missouri and was educated in the local schools and in Chicago and began her professional career at the age of 18.

"My father came from the sturdy stock of the middle West," said Mrs. Coburn in her dressing room a few evenings ago, "but California wove a spell about him in his boyhood and the sunset splendor of the Golden Gate was always uppermost in his mind and the noblest vision in his memory, and I have always been and shall always be proud of the spirit of the West.

"Father was interested in cattle ranching and mining. He was one of the pioneers of the overland trail and travelled across the continent from Ohio through Indiana, Missouri, Kansas and Colorado, over the Rockies and the Sierras to the Pacific coast with an ox team and the historic 'prairie schooner,' and was subsequently the owner of a line of transportation called the 'ox train,' which consisted of three prairie wagons and twelve oxen. He never wearied of relating his experiences of those venturesome journeys, much to my delight, and curiously enough I covered practically the same trail, although not in the same primitive manner, years afterward as an actress. Father often told me that when he made his first memorable overland journey and passed through Colorado the now flourishing city of Denver was a village, and he could have bought lots on the site of the present city for a pair of shoes, but he didn't have the shoes. That was during the first gold mining craze of the far West and Pacific slope—the land of the vine clad hills and snow topped peaks immortalized by Bret Harte. Father frequently related to me of moneys being paid to him in hats brimful of gold pieces, and of a little mining camp called Belle nestled in the hills of central California where the only inhabitants were aborigines, and he used to feed the Indian papooses through a window in his cabin."

The Coburns were married in 1906 in Baltimore, when they organized their first Shakespearian company which embraced a number of now well known actors including Charles Kent and Fuller Mellish. They have the extraordinary record of having played "Macbeth" for a season of twenty-eight consecutive weeks. They have given al fresco performances of Shakespeare and classic Greek dramas in over a hundred seats of learning throughout the country, many of which were presented on the campus of Columbia University. The story of their acquisition of "The Better 'Ole" and its commercial and artistic success has already been noted in these columns.

Mrs. Coburn has an abiding faith and hope that the nationally endowed theatre similar to the system in vogue in France and continental Europe is not far distant in this country.

"Like the proverbial future event casting its shadows in advance," continued Mrs. Coburn, "the endowed theatre will eventually become a reality, but just now the question of plays is the great problem—plays that will attract and interest the knowing ones. When you succeed in interesting the thinking classes the others will follow, and I quite agree with John Galsworthy that this burden rests almost entirely on the shoulders of the dramatists, and I am bound to say that I have an abiding faith that our big plays will come from American writers. Mr. Coburn and I are looking for such a play and the dramatist who comes along with it may feel assured of an immediate production."

THE MODERN WAY.

A WORD of praise for the modern actor and his methods from a distinguished player of long experience is as much a pleasure to hear as it is a novelty, for the older Thespians seldom approve the younger generation. An interview with the average player whose early training in the theatre has been in the classics will quickly reveal his belief that Shakespeare should furnish the basis of all dramatic training; that the ambitious youth should have years of stock acting; should be able to fence and dance, to play some musical instrument—that his education for the stage should, in fact, cover a wide range of subjects in which he should be proficient.

Departing decisively from this habit of thought is Dodson Mitchell, the distinguished actor who plays *Sandy McKillop*, the North of Ireland publican, in David Belasco's production of "Dark Rosaleen," which is now in its second month at the Belasco Theatre. Despite the fact that Mr. Mitchell spent ten years in association with Julia Marlowe in the portrayal of Shakespearean characters he is of the firm conviction that the classic drama holds more dangers for the young actor than it offers advantages. And he offers his own experience to prove it.

"When I became associated with Miss Marlowe I had had only my three years experience with my aunt, Maggie Mitchell, on the stage," Mr. Mitchell began his explanation. "When I came out of this association after ten years I was fit for nothing but the reading of blank verse. At least that was the way it seemed to me in my first engagement subsequent to my long Shakespearian experience. I was associated with John Drew under the management of the late Charles Frohman in 'Richard Carvel.' I had only one line in the play, which ran, 'It is an easy matter.' I insisted on injecting into it the rhythmic music of blank verse. Edward Rose, who was our stage director, would say to me, 'Come, Dodson, get off the Acropolis. Take off your sandals. Come on out on Broadway and talk conversationally.' As absurd as it may sound, it took me weeks to achieve a conversational tone in reading that one little phrase in 'Richard Carvel' which fell to my lot. The cause of my trouble lay in the fact that one can never read blank verse conversationally. Its deliverance is not the natural deliverance required by modern drama, and it is just for this reason that an actor who plays Shakespeare for a long period of time falls into pedantic reading and theatrical habits which he finds a great handicap to achieving the naturalness necessary to the success of a modern role.

"Of course one learns much from classic drama," Mr. Mitchell went on to say, "but I do not agree with the many who claim that it is indispensable to a player's success on the stage to-day. No more than I agree with those who believe in the subsidized theatre and a long stock training for the youthful beginner. In my estimation the chief charm of the young folk on our stage to-day is their naturalness—their freedom from affectation and theatricalism. Their very emancipation from the rigid discipline of the dramatic training of the past generation is responsible for their chief charm."

In the engagements which followed that of Mr. Mitchell in "Richard Carvel" he saw to it that there was no classic drama, and in time he was able to work out of the difficulties in which the long years spent in the deliverance of blank verse plunged him, as was proved by his subsequent association with Arnold Daly in the first group of Shaw plays presented in America and which brought to that playwright our first appreciation of the delicious devilry of his satire. That Arnold Daly approached the presentation of Shaw with some trepidation was manifest in the fact that the first of his plays offered ("Candida") was billed for a single matinee. So great was its success that it played twenty-five consecutive weeks.

Mr. Mitchell's next experience was with Mme. Nazimova in a group of Ibsen plays, an association which lasted two years and brought much delight to him. In more recent years he has appeared under the Selwyn management with Jane Cowl in "Within the Law," playing in this crook melodrama for seventy-six weeks in New York and forty in Boston. He was also associated with Julia Arthur in "The Eternal Magdalen" and with Lou Tellegen in "Taking Chances," but only once in his long and brilliant career did Mr. Mitchell have the pleasure of appearing under the Belasco management before he was engaged for "Dark Rosaleen." That once was with Nance O'Neil in "The Lily," which Mr. Belasco produced in 1912.

THE WEEK'S OFFERINGS.

TO-NIGHT—Hippodrome: The Lambs' Gambol, as produced successfully at the Manhattan Opera House on Sunday night last, will be repeated here because not enough spectators could squirm their way into that playhouse. The same illimitable cast will perform the various sketches—do you suppose a single one of those players would submit to being left out?

MONDAY—New Amsterdam: The thirteenth annual manifestation of the "Ziegfeld Follies" will come into being under the watchful eye of Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., as the next great event after the signing of the armistice. Irving Berlin, strengthened by his war service, has been equal to writing the music and lyrics for the second and final act. The score for the ballet in which Maryilynn Miller has her fling has been dictated by Victor Herbert. Rennold Wolf has been in control of the comedy scenes, and, as was inevitable, additional lyrics flew from the right hand of Gene Buck, while Dave Stamper and Victor Jacobi wrote the music with both hands. Ned Wayburn did the staging under the impulse of Joseph Urban's settings. The cast is derived from the following: Marilynn Miller, Eddie Cantor, Johnny Dooley, Ray Dooley, Nancy Brown, Lucille Chalfant, DeLyle Alda, Van and Schenck, Maurice and Florence Walton, John Steele, George Le Maire, Eddie Dowling, the Fairbanks Twins, Florence Ware, Jessie Reed, Mauresette, Lucille Levant, Phil Dwyer, Kathryn Perry, Mary Hay, Hazel Washburn and Bert Williams, who now forms the Old Guard.

Booth Theatre: The Coburns' production of "The Better 'Ole," with all the original cast still clustering around, will romp out of the Cort Theatre and fill the gap in the life of the Booth.

could they see Vera Michelena as she really is.

Miss Michelena is the "movie vamp" in "Take It From Me" at the Central Theatre. As far as appearances are concerned she is quite as might be expected. Her beauty is of the dark, sparkling sort that exponents of the art made famous by Cleopatra and Theda Bara are expected to possess.

But right there all similitude ceases. She is neither languid nor temperamental. She doesn't own a wolfhound, nor any other pets, unless the flock of chickens on her farm at Great Neck, L. I., could be termed thus; it would be well nigh impossible to picture her striking anybody with anything.

Miss Michelena was born in New York and moved to San Francisco when only a little girl. Both her parents were theatrical people. Her mother was a musical comedy actress and her father an opera singer. Miss Michelena—pronounced "Mish-ay-lay-nah"—uses her real name on the stage and is very proud of it, because her father was a famous Spanish tenor. It was he who taught her singing. In San Francisco she studied ballet dancing and music, both vocal and instrumental. When she was a tiny tot, as early as 4 years old, she attended opera performances, not understanding, but not unappreciative even at that tender age. Her father had planned for her an operatic career.

As a result of this early musical training and after her course had been completed at a convent in New York State Miss Michelena's stage aspirations were realized. She had no tedious climb, but began at the very first playing feature parts. Her first appearance was at the age of 16 in "Princess Chic," the role made famous by Marguerita Sylva. "The Love Mill" was the vehicle which first brought her to the immediate attention of theatregoers. She then appeared in Reginald DeKoven's "Snow Man," then "The Tourists," "Ziegfeld's Follies," "Lost Chord," "Lombardi Ltd.," "Flo-Flo," and now "Take It From Me." She has also played a succession of "wild woman" roles in films successfully.

OUT OF THE WEST.

VIOLETTE WILSON, who plays the daughter of Lew Fields in "A Lonely Romeo" at the Shubert Theatre is a newcomer to Broadway, having been seen here only once before, in "Papa" at the Little Theatre. Miss Wilson is as interesting off the stage as she is before the footlights and her fresh personality speaks of the West. She belongs to what might be called the "ultramodern" school of womanhood, and much of her time is devoted to the dissemination of its doctrines.

Two and a half short years ago, when Miss Wilson, then living in her home town, Berkeley, California, and attending the University of California, left that institution because it did not afford her soul the opportunity to "expand," all of the West became interested in this wilful and idealistic girl. The fact that she is the daughter of J. Stitt Wilson, former Socialist Mayor of Berkeley, and that her radical dad sanctioned her action by telling the newspaper men: "Violette did as she should have done by quitting the university" and "she can work out her own salvation, I won't hinder her; she's a Shaw, Montessori disciple," kept her before the Western public's eye for many months afterward. In regard to education, Miss Wilson, shortly after her University of California escapade, told a reporter:

"A child should be allowed to work out its own salvation to its own liking at all times. My parents have always believed this, with the result that neither my brother Gladstone nor myself were ever forced to do anything. Neither do I believe in compulsory education. Like my father, I believe that the teacher should simply provide materials for the child and then direct its development, with special recognition of the varied capacities of various children."

Even in religion Miss Wilson has her own strange ideas. Her ideas include the belief that human souls should be allowed to bloom naturally, day by day, without too much emphasis being placed upon the formal aspects of religion; she believes that a woman is a "person," not "just a woman," and as such is entitled to every right possessed by a man. Also, and especially, Miss Wilson believes in many cases modern universities are a positive hindrance, which is why she left the California institution, prepared to "find herself" in the turmoil of every day life where real live problems must be met and solved each day.

A DIFFERENT VAMP.

THE movie taught public, whose conception of a vampire is a languid, temperamental person always accompanied by a lank white Russian wolfhound in lieu of a pet, possessed of an unfortunate tendency to strike her long suffering maid with any handy implement at the slightest provocation, and whose favorite pastime consists in throwing wine glasses against the opposite wall at little suppers in her Riverside Drive apartment, would sustain a severe shock

WANTED—AN ACTRESS.

IS there, upon this terrestial globe, disengaged at the present time and waiting for opportunity to tap her upon the shoulder, an actress who can fulfil the following conditions as specified by Morris Gest, who will produce "Aphrodite" at the Century Theatre in October? Here are the stage requirements for the actress to play this role must have:

The strength and passion of Florence Reed;

The dignity and poise of Mary Garden;

The beauty of Elsie Ferguson;

The physical perfection of Marjorie Rambeau;

The tensity of Theda Bara;

The dramatic ability of Bernhardt;

The charm of Marie Tempest;

The intelligence of Mrs. Fiske.

A pretty big order, eh? But also a pretty big part—in fact, one of the greatest roles ever written and therefore requiring a combination of the best qualities of many of our greatest feminine stars.

Will Morris Gest find her? Perhaps, lurking in the by ways of the drama, as yet unheralded and unsung, a feminine genius who combines most of these big qualities among her talents, may be unearthed to make New Yorkers sit up and take notice when "Aphrodite" is produced at the Century Theatre in October.

"My search for the perfect actress may be more difficult than that of Diogenes with his lantern," admitted Mr. Gest last week at the Century Theatre, where already scenic and costume rehearsals of the Parisian spectacle are in course of preparation. "But my partner, Mr. Comstock, and I, propose to keep on searching in an effort to get the ideal actress for this role. Many American and English actresses of course could play it with success, since the role is such a wonderful part, but I want to get the perfect actress for the role. Many of the American stars who might play it are tied up with contracts for motion pictures, while others are under contracts to different managements and therefore unavailable.

"The part which I am having such a difficult time to fill is that of Chrysis, a courtesan of ancient Alexandria, who is such an alluring and tempestuous young woman that she fascinates the sculptor of the statue of Aphrodite and wins him away from his art and to his downfall. The play as done at the Theatre Renaissance, Paris, is by Pierre Frondaie, adapted from the famous novel of Pierre Luys, but the American version will be slightly altered in order to conform to American standards. Incidental music has been composed for it by Henri Fevrier, the composer of the operas 'Monna Vanna' and 'Gismonda,' in which Mary Garden appeared with Campanini's forces in New York last winter. The drama 'Aphrodite' must not be confused with the grand opera by Erlanger of the same title, which is also taken from the novel by Pierre Luys. The Parisian play might possibly shock American Puritanism, but despite the changes which have been made to render 'Aphrodite' acceptable to American audiences its pictures of Alexandrian life in the third century will provide innumerable opportunities for scenic display.

So, then, actresses of America, here is your chance. If you fulfil the conditions apply to Morris Gest, Century Theatre, New York, P. D. Q.